

LETTER FROM MRS. CLARA T. LEONARD,

IN OPPOSITION TO WOMAN SUFFRAGE,

FIRST WOMAN MEMBER OF THE STATE BOARD OF HEALTH, LUNACY, AND CHARITY
OF MASSACHUSETTS.

THE following letter was read by Thornton K. Lothrop, Esq., at the hearing before the Legislative Committee on Woman Suffrage, January 29, 1884:—

The principal reasons assigned for giving suffrage to women are these :

That the right to vote is a natural and inherent right of which women are deprived by the tyranny of men.

That the fact that the majority of women do not wish for the right or privilege to vote is not a reason for depriving the minority of an inborn right.

That women are taxed but not represented, contrary to the principles of free government.

That society would gain by the participation of women in government, because women are purer and more conscientious than men, and especially that the cause of temperance would be promoted by women's votes.

Those women who are averse to female suffrage hold differing opinions on all these points, and are entitled to be heard fairly and without unjust reproach and contempt on the part of "suffragists," so called.

The right to vote is not an inherent right, but, like the right to hold land, is conferred upon individuals by general consent, with certain limitations, and for the good of all.

It is as true to say that the earth was made for all its inhabitants, and that no man has a right to appropriate a portion of its surface, as to say that all persons have a right to participate in government. Many persons can be found to hold both these opinions. Experience has proved that the general good is promoted by ownership of the soil, with the resultant inducement to its improvement.

Voting is simply a mathematical test of strength. Uncivilized nations strive for mastery by physical combat, thus wasting life and resources. Enlightened societies agree to determine the relative strength of opposing parties by actual count. God has made women weaker than men, incapable of taking part in battles, indisposed to make riot and political disturbance.

* Mrs. Leonard was characterized by the late Senator George F. Hoar as "the highest living authority on private and public charities."

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The vote which, in the hand of a man, is a "possible bayonet," would not, when thrown by a woman, represent any physical power to enforce her will. If all the women in the State voted in one way, and all the men in the opposite one, the women, even if in the majority, would not carry the day, because the vote would not be an estimate of material strength and the power to enforce the will of the majority. When one considers the strong passions and conflicts excited in elections, it is vain to suppose that the really stronger would yield to the weaker party.

It is no more unjust to deprive women of the ballot than to deprive minors, who outnumber those above the age of majority, and who might well claim, many of them, to be as well able to decide political questions as their elders.

If the majority of women are either not desirous to vote or are strongly opposed to voting, the minority should yield in this, as they are obliged to do in all other public matters. In fact, they will be obliged to yield, so long as the present state of opinion exists among women in general, for legislators will naturally consult the wishes of the women of their own families and neighborhood, and be governed by them. There can be no doubt that in this State, where women are highly respected and have great influence, the ballot would be readily granted to them by men, if they desired it, or generally approved of woman suffrage. Women are taxed, it is true ; so are minors, without the ballot ; it is untrue, to say that either class is not represented. The thousand ties of relationship and friendship cause the identity of interest between the sexes. What is good in a community for men, is good also for their wives and sisters, daughters and friends. The laws of Massachusetts discriminate much in favor of women, by exempting unmarried women of small estate from taxation ; by allowing women, and not men, to acquire a settlement without paying a tax ; by compelling husbands to support their wives, but exempting the wife, even when rich, from supporting an indigent husband ; by making men liable for debts of wives, and not *vice versa*. In the days of the American Revolution, the first cause of complaint was, that a whole people were taxed but not represented. To-day there is not a single interest of woman which is not shared and defended by men, not a subject in which she takes an intelligent interest in which she cannot exert an influence in the community proportional to her character and ability. It is, because the men who govern, live, not in a remote country with separate interests, but in the closest relations of family and neighborhood, and bound by the tenderest ties to the other sex, who are fully and well represented by relations, friends, and neighbors in every locality. That women are purer and more conscientious than men, as a sex, is exceedingly doubtful when applied to politics. The faults of the sexes are different, according to their constitution and habits of life. Men are more violent and open in their misdeeds ; but any person who knows human nature well, and has examined it in its various phases, knows that each sex is open to its peculiar temptation and sin ; that the human heart is weak and

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prone to evil without distinction of sex. It seems certain that, were women admitted to vote and to hold political office, all the intrigue, corruption, and selfishness displayed by men in political life would also be found among women. In the temperance cause we should gain little or nothing by admitting women to vote, for two reasons: first, that experience has proved that the strictest laws cannot be enforced if a great number of people determine to drink liquor; secondly, because among women voters we should find in our cities thousands of foreign birth who habitually drink beer and spirits daily without intoxication, and who regard license or prohibitory laws as an infringement of their liberty. It has been said that municipal suffrage for women in England has proved a political success. Even if this is true, it offers no parallel to the condition of things in our own cities: first, because there is in England a property qualification required to vote, which excludes the more ignorant and irresponsible classes, and makes women voters few and generally intelligent; secondly, because England is an old, conservative country, with much emigration and but little immigration. Here is a constant influx of foreigners: illiterate, without love of our country or interest in, or knowledge of, the history of our liberties, to whom, after a short residence, we give a full share in our government. The result begins to be alarming — enormous taxation, purchasable votes, demagogism, — all these alarm the more thoughtful, and we are not yet sure of the end. It is a wise thought that the possible bayonet or ruder weapon in the hands of our new citizens would be even worse than the ballot, and our safer course is to give the immigrants a stake and interest in the government. But when we learn that on an average one thousand immigrants per week landed at the port of Boston in the past calendar year, is it not well to consider carefully how we double and more than double the popular vote, with all its dangers and its ingredients of ignorance and irresponsibility? Last of all, it must be considered that the lives of men and women are essentially different. One sex lives in public, in constant conflict with the world; the other sex must live chiefly in private and domestic life, or the race will be without homes and gradually die out. If nearly one-half of the male voters of our State forego their duty or privilege, as is the fact, what proportion of women would exercise the suffrage? Probably a very small one. The heaviest vote would be in the cities, as now, and the ignorant and unfit women would be the ready prey of the unscrupulous demagogue. Women do not hold a position inferior to men. In this land they have the softer side of life, — the best of everything. There are, of course, exceptions — individuals — whose struggle in life is hard, whose husbands and fathers are tyrants instead of protectors; so there are bad wives, and men ruined and disheartened by selfish, idle women.

The best work that a woman can do for the purifying of politics is by her influence over men, by the wise training of her children, by her intelligent, unselfish counsel to husband, brother, or friend, by a thorough knowledge and discussion of the needs of her community. Many laws on the statute

books of our own and other States have been the work of women. More might be added.

It is the opinion of many of us, that woman's power is greater without the ballot or possibility of office-holding for gain, when, standing outside of politics, she discusses great questions upon their merit. Much has been achieved by women in the anti-slavery cause, the temperance cause, the improvement of public and private charities, the reformation of criminals, all by intelligent discussion and influence upon men. Our legislators have been ready to listen to women, and carry out their plans when well framed. Women can do much useful public service upon boards of education, school committees, and public charities, and are beginning to do such work. It is of vital importance to the integrity of our charitable and educational administration that it be kept out of politics. Is it not well, that we should have one sex who have no political ends to serve, who can fill responsible positions of public trust? Voting alone can easily be performed by women without rude contact, but to attain any political power women must affiliate themselves with men; because women will differ on public questions, must attend primary meetings and caucuses, will inevitably hold public office and strive for it; in short, women must enter the political arena. This result will be repulsive to a large portion of the sex, and would tend to make women unfeminine and combative, which would be a detriment to society.

It is well that men after the burden and heat of the day should return to homes where the quiet side of life is presented to them. In these peaceful New England homes of ours, great and noble men have been reared by wise and pious mothers, who instructed them, not in politics, but in those general principles of justice, integrity, and unselfishness, which belong to and will insure statesmanship in the men who are true to them. Here is the stronghold of the sex, weakest in body, powerful for good or evil over the stronger one, whom women sway and govern; not by the ballot and by greater numbers, but by those gentle influences designed by the Creator to soften and subdue man's ruder nature.

(Signed)

CLARA T. LEONARD.

Issued by the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women.

Pamphlets and leaflets may be obtained from the Secretary,

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